

What is claimed is:

SUB A⁵ → 1. A method of conferencing comprising forming a main conference between a plurality of users, providing a user with an option to request a subconference with a subset of other users, forming a subconference between said user and the subset of other users, and at least partially removing those users in the subconference from the main conference during the subsistence of the subconference.

2. A method of conferencing according to claim 1, wherein those users in the subconference are entirely isolated from participation in the main conference during the subsistence of the subconference.

SUB A⁵ → 3. A method of conferencing according to claim 1, wherein the users in the subconference are prevented from contributing to the main conference but are able to monitor communications in the main conference during the subsistence of the subconference.

4. A method of conferencing according to claim 1, wherein the main conference utilises a plurality of media types, users in the subconference utilise one or more of said media types, and users in the subconference can actively or passively participate in the main conference in at least one media type during the subsistence of the subconference.

5. A method of conferencing according to claim 1, wherein the users utilise a plurality of media types in the main conference and/or subconference, said media

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11. A method of conferencing according to claim 1,
wherein the main conference is formed on a conference

bridge to which each of the main conference users is connected.

12. A method according of conferencing to claim 11,
5 wherein the subconference users remain connected to the bridge and the subconference is formed by creating a second conference on the bridge simultaneously with the main conference.

10 13. A method of conferencing according to claim 1, wherein the user(s) to whom the request is addressed have the option of accepting or refusing to join the subconference, and wherein such acceptance or rejection determines whether or not they remain as part of said
15 subset.

14. A method of conferencing according to claim 1, wherein each user in the subconference is provided with the option to leave the subconference at any time
20 during the subsistence of the subconference.

15. A method of conferencing according to claim 14, wherein users opting to leave the subconference are automatically returned to full participation in the
25 main conference.

16. A method of conferencing according to claim 1, wherein users in the subconference are presented with the option of requesting one or more of the other
30 subconference users to join a nested subconference within said initial subconference.

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17. A method according to claim 1, wherein users in the subconference are presented with the option of requesting one or more of the other subconference users to leave said initial subconference and form a new subconference without rejoining the main conference.

18. A conferencing server comprising:

- i) a main conference list memory unit for maintaining a list of the users connected to the server as part of a conference,
- ii) main signal processing means for receiving incoming signals from said users, processing said signals and generating outgoing signals to said users,
- iii) a main control unit for controlling said main conference list memory unit and said main signal processing means,
- iv) a subconference list memory unit for maintaining a list of a subset of said users,
- v) subconference signal processing means for generating outgoing signals to said subset of users, wherein the signals generated by said subconference signal processing means include subconference signals which are not included in the signals generated by said main signal processing means and sent to users outside said subset, and
- vi) a subconference control unit for controlling said subconference list memory unit and said subconference signal processing means.

19. A conferencing server according to claim 18 wherein the main conference list memory unit and the

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subconference list memory unit are logical areas within a single memory unit.

20. A conferencing server according to claim 18
5 wherein the functions of the main signal processing means and of the subconference signal processing means are carried out by the same signal processing unit.

21. A conferencing server according to claim 20,
10 wherein said signal processing unit is adapted to combine signals of different media types.

22. A conferencing server according to claim 21,
15 wherein said media types are selected from video, audio and data.

23. A conferencing server according to claim 21,
20 wherein said signal processing unit is dynamically programmable to generate outgoing signal streams containing an arbitrary combination of media types selected from the incoming signals from the users.

24. A conferencing server according to claim 18,
25 wherein said main control unit includes means for forwarding said list of users in the conference to each of the users.

25. A conferencing server according to claim 18,
30 wherein said subconference control unit includes means for forwarding said list of said subset of users to said subset of users, and optionally to all users on the list maintained in the main conference list memory unit.

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26. A conferencing system comprising a conferencing server according to claim 18, a call server connected to the conferencing server, and means for connecting
5 users to the call server.

27. A computer program product containing software in machine readable form for managing a conference, said software comprising means for generating and
10 maintaining a list of participants in a main conference, means for providing a participant with an option to request a subconference with a subset of other users in said list, means for forming a list of participants in a subconference between said
15 participant and the subset of other participants, and means for at least partially removing those participants in the subconference from the main conference during the subsistence of the subconference.

28. A computer program product according to claim 27, wherein said main conference is conducted in a plurality of media and wherein said means for providing a participant with an option to request a subconference includes means for enabling said participant to select
25 one or more of said media for use during said subconference.

SUB A⁵ > 29. A computer program product containing software in machine readable form for managing a conference, said
30 software comprising means for forming a main conference between a plurality of users, means for providing a user with an option to request a subconference with a subset of other users, means for forming a

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34.. A terminal according to claim 32 when in the form of a multimedia terminal.